



Open Briefing: Head Start Pathway

27 July 2026 – 11.00am

Attendees

Elected Members: Mayor Fauono Laban, Deputy Mayor Brown, Cr Dyer, Cr Edwards, Cr Lewis, Cr Mitchell, Cr Parkin, Cr Puketapu, Cr Ravi, Cr Stallinger, Cr Tonga-Grant and Cr Yung.

Mana Whenua: Kura Moeahu (via audio-visual link); Liz Mellish and Vicki Hollywell

Staff: J Miller, Chief Executive; A Blackshaw, Director Neighbourhoods and Communities; J Downing, Director Strategy and Engagement; J Kingsbury, Director Economy and Development; D Nunnian, Acting Chief Financial Officer; B Cato, Chief Legal Officer; C Ellis, Head of Chief Executive's Office; K Stannard, Head of Democratic and Mayoral Services; A Ryall, Mayor's Office Manager; M Schwalger, Senior Communications and Engagement Advisor; K Glanville, Senior Democracy Advisor and V Gilmour, Democracy Advisor (via audio-visual link).

Apologies

Cr Barratt and Cr Shaw

Introduction and Key Objectives of the Briefing

The purpose of the briefing is to discuss the challenges and implications of local government amalgamation, including its impact on community representation, regional functions and Māori participation.

It provides updates on recent Mayoral forums, gathers perspectives from key community and iwi leaders, and clarifies the process and risks associated with the Head Start amalgamation proposals.

Speakers

L Mellish, Mana Whenua representative spoke in support of local government amalgamation, highlighting the historical context of the region, the importance of taking a long term approach to decision making, and the need for a governance model that balanced regional collaboration with strong local representation.

K Moeahu, Mana Whenua representative emphasised the importance of meaningful iwi participation in the amalgamation process and ensuring Māori language, tikanga and iwi perspectives were reflected in any future governance arrangements. He also advocated for decisions to recognise iwi boundaries, rather than being limited to existing council boundaries and welcomed broader regional inclusion were supported by iwi and councils.

Cr Dyer and C Ellis, Head of Chief Executive's Office updated members on discussions from the Metro councils' meeting, including regional challenges relating to rates, infrastructure, water reform and the Head Start local government amalgamation process. They advised that government was seeking proposals that supported regional collaboration and strong local representation, and outlined discussions on governance arrangements, including community councils, regional services and the risks of fragmenting existing regional functions. They also explained the Head Start assessment process, including the ability to include conditions within proposals, and clarified that councils were responsible for developing and submitting proposals for Government consideration, rather than making the final decision on amalgamation.

Questions and discussion points

Members discussed:

- governance arrangements that could support regional collaboration while maintaining strong local representation, including through community councils with meaningful decision-making powers.
- the importance of retaining regional services and expertise under any future governance model, noting concerns that fragmentation could reduce the effectiveness of services such as flood protection.

- the potential to include clearly defined conditions within Head Start proposals that would enable councils to reconsider their participation if key elements of a proposal changed significantly.
- the need to balance differing community views on amalgamation with long-term regional planning and the interests of future generations.
- that any conditions enabling councils to reconsider their participation in the Head Start process would need to be clearly defined and linked to specific circumstances, rather than providing for withdrawal at any time.
- that government had not yet determined how Māori representation would be addressed under a future governance model. Options discussed included a new referendum, transitional arrangements based on current representation, or legislative change.
- the need for community councils to have meaningful decision-making powers to support strong local representation, noting that establishing community councils alone may not achieve the intended outcomes without appropriate authority.
- that proposals would continue to evolve through the detailed design phase, with further opportunities for councils to influence the governance model. It was noted that participation in the Head Start process could provide councils with greater opportunity to influence the development of the final governance model.
- that councils were being asked to submit proposals on how local government reform could be implemented in the region, rather than to determine whether amalgamation should occur, with the final decision resting with government.

Next steps

- proposals will continue to be refined through the detailed design phase.
- councils will receive further reports and have additional opportunities to consider and provide input into the governance model as the Head Start process progresses.
- any proposal submitted through the Head Start process will be considered by government, which will make the final decision on any changes to local

government arrangements. Proposals will continue to be refined during the detailed design phase.

- councils will receive further reports and opportunities to influence the governance model as the Head Start process progresses.
- any proposal submitted through the Head Start process will be considered by government, which will make the final decision on local government reform.

The open briefing closed at 12.05pm